

CUTTING EDGE ACTION

X-Men fans won't be disappointed as Wolverine returns madder than ever in the prequel, writes **Colin Newton**

X-Men Origins: Wolverine

Director Gavin Hood
(M) 107 minutes, US

★★★★

TALK about being in the wars. First, it was Hugh Jackman evading Japanese troops in *Australia*. Then, his good mate Liev Schreiber took on German soldiers in *Defiance* (still in cinemas).

Now, they team up in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* as brothers who fight alongside each other in four major wars over 114 years — and that's all before the opening credits.

This all-guns-blazing introduction sets the scene and provides an impressive beginning to what is ultimately a brilliant action flick, albeit one about mutant comic-book characters.

The film, which was shot mostly in Australia and New Zealand, revolves around Wolverine (Jackman) and his back story.

A back story, you may have noticed, that is rather long in the tooth. Indeed, Jackman may not look a day over 39, but Wolverine is pushing 150.

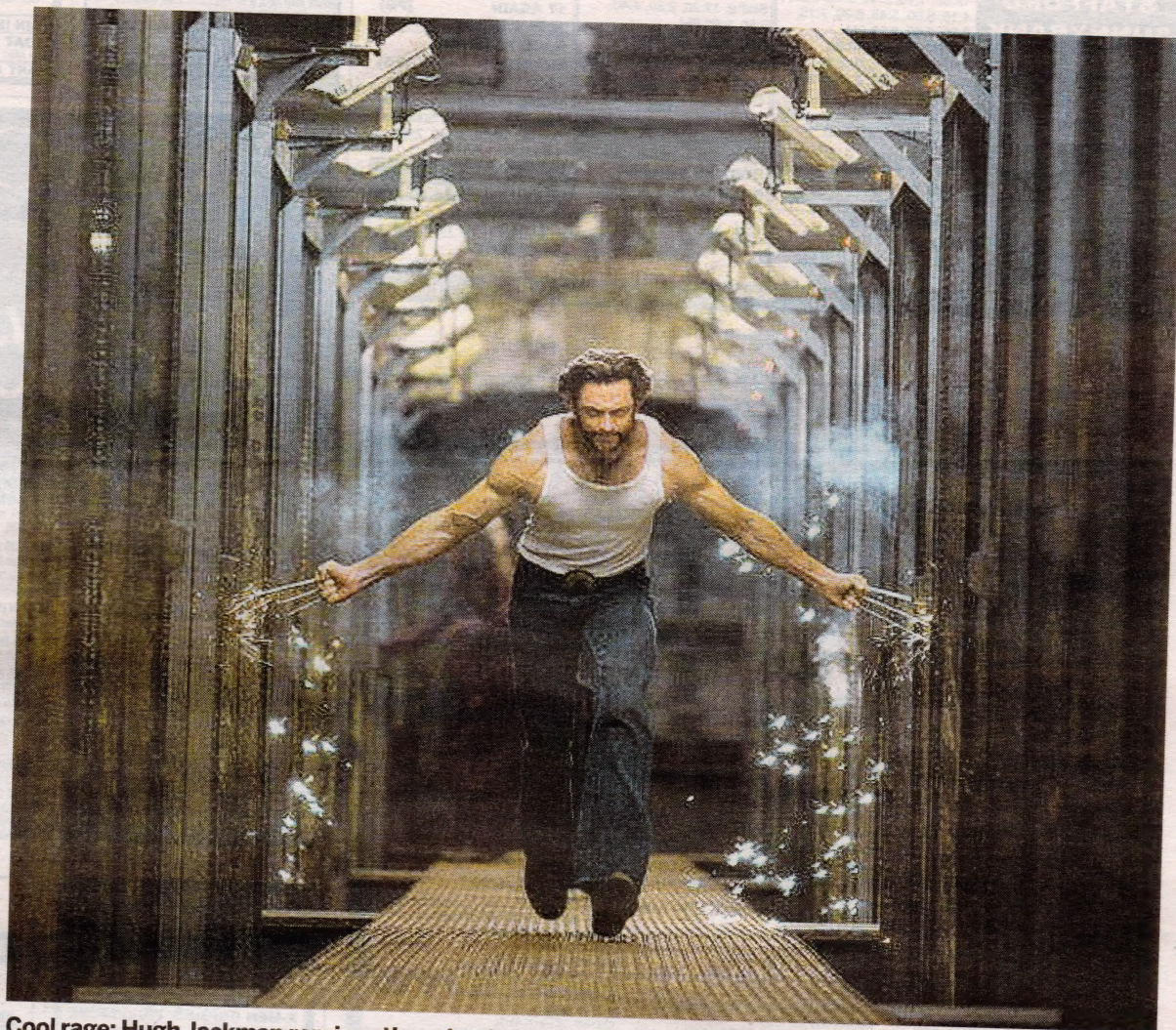
Turns out the man-of-steel-claws cannot die.

Old age is as risk-free to him as recession is to McDonald's.

Heck, even bullets don't hurt him. Government official: "You were sentenced to death. It was carried out by a firing squad at ten hundred hours. How'd that go?"

Wolverine: "It tickled."

Joining Wolverine for the ride is his fiery half-brother Victor Creed (Schreiber), the future Sabretooth. Now here is a guy in need of a manicure and orthodontics, not to mention anger-management classes.



Cool rage: Hugh Jackman reprises the role of popular fighting machine Wolverine

The dynamic duo join a team of mutants — not the X-Men — that includes Bolt (Dominic Monaghan), Kestrel (Will.I.Am), Gambit (Taylor Kitsch), Agent Zero (Daniel Henney) and Deadpool (Ryan Reynolds).

They're a lethal outfit led by William Stryker (Danny Huston), and Wolverine is perhaps the only one with compassion or a conscience. As he puts it: "I'm the best there is at what I do, but what I do isn't very nice."

Of course, there are downsides to being a compassionate killer with razor-sharp claws. Such as the need

to consistently replace the bedsheets every time you have a nightmare.

And yes, Wolverine is plagued with plenty of nightmare fodder.

Fortunately, his love interest Kayla Silverfox (Lynn Collins) is on hand to soothe the savage beast.

That said, he remains largely unsettled throughout the film, which is a great thing for the viewer.

Jackman's portrayal of rage is cool. It's something, I'm sure, our gentle Hugh would never unleash in real life, but must be the perfect visual aid for his wife to ensure his children stay in line.

"Now, look children, don't make Daddy angry."

Fans of *Batman Begins*, the X-Men trilogy and big-budget action blockbusters are sure to revel in the explosiveness of this edge-of-your-seat prequel. I sure did.

* HIGHS & LOWS

- + How can you not love Wolverine?
- Plot points need expanding

Silent life of 'untouchables'

Samson and Delilah

Director Warwick Thornton
(MA) 101 min

★★★★ 1/2

THERE'S a moment in *Samson and Delilah* that is intensely uncomfortable to watch.

Actually, there are many moments in Warwick Thornton's formidable debut that are uncomfortable to watch — but I suspect that's the point.

Sixteen-year-old Delilah, sole carer and apprentice to her artist grandmother, has fallen on desperately hard times. Day in, day out, nothing ever changes in her tiny, remote central Australian community, until tragedy and violence erupts and she flees in a stolen car.

With her is the hopeless, petrol-sniffing Samson. The pair end up marooned, homeless and penniless in the nearest city.

Gradually Delilah devolves, through cruel circumstance, from a kind-hearted, industrious young woman into another person en-

tirely — a stereotype we've all been exposed to. Belittled by poverty and an atrocious attack, the unwashed Delilah tries to ply her paintings at a trendy cafe filled with white affluent urban types and their basin-sized lattes.

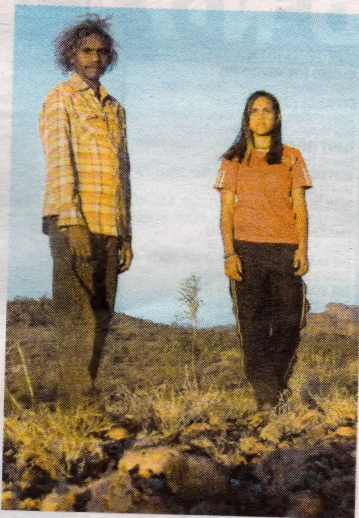
Collectively, the patrons recoil from her; in their eyes she is barely human. Something to be feared, not pitied.

This is the moment where the viewer might feel complicit. You suppress the urge to recoil, too, from this bald tale of a social reality that's just too hard, too complex, an impasse.

Writer/director Thornton says it's a film about people who are classed not even as people, let alone people who are allowed to love or have emotions — the untouchables.

Despite its romantically imbued title, this is no first-date movie. It is an important film that will no doubt become an Australian film studies staple.

The thing that stays with you long after the end credits is the searing realism of *Samson and Delilah*. Thornton shot it with a single hand-held camera and he



Despair: Samson and Delilah must fight to survive in the city

has exquisitely captured real time — flies settling languidly on dust-streaked faces and the blistering inertia, mundaneness and squalor of community life.

Samson and Delilah inhabit a world of silence — the two lead characters (played by Rowan McNamara and Marissa Gibson) barely exchange one sentence of dialogue. This is a tale of blind survival, and how the body can endure long after the mind surrenders.

Thankfully, at the end, we are given a sliver of hope.

Amanda Dardanis

Samson and Delilah opens in cinemas on Thursday.

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